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REVIEWS

SPANISH-AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

Four or five years ago only the most advanced students of Spanish were able to get, in some of our universities, first-hand knowledge of the literature of Spanish America. They had to depend entirely upon foreign publishers, and even at that the number of suitable editions that were readily available was very small. This number has been increased rapidly in the last five years by the book publishers of Spain and South America. Especially noteworthy is the fine series being published by the Editorial-América, Madrid, under the general title *Biblioteca Andrés Bello*, so that there is no reason why advanced students in our universities should not now get acquainted with the rich literature of the "Other Americans."

A more urgent need was that of well-edited texts that might serve to introduce high school students and elementary college classes to the life and literature of Spanish America. The first to respond to this urgent call were the editors of informative text-books, that is, those that supplied all kinds of information about Spanish America in simple, made-to-order Spanish, or in selections from Spanish-American writers chosen on the basis of simplicity of style. To these were added other text-books containing selections of greater literary or historical value and two novels that are to be counted among the best produced in South America. Recently have appeared three collections of short stories, two of which have for primary purpose the introduction of our students to several of the best recent writers.

- (a) **Cuentos Hispanoamericanos**, with Grammar Reviews and Exercises. Edited by Cincinato G. B. Laguardia, Assistant Professor of Modern Languages, United States Naval Academy. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1920. xv + 247 pp. (184 text, exercises and notes; 63 vocabulary).
- (b) **Cuentos de la América Española**. Selected and edited, with notes and vocabulary by Alfred Coester, author of "A Literary History of Spanish America," etc. Ginn and Company, Boston, 1920. vii + 236 pp. (136 text and illustrations, 22 notes, 76 vocabulary).
- (c) **Cuentos Hispanoamericanos**. Edited with notes and vocabulary by Charles Alfred Turrell, Professor of Romance Languages, University of Arizona. Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1921. vii + 152 pp. (83 text with 19 illustrations and map, 12 notes, 54 vocabulary).

(a) Professor Laguardia has attempted to combine the pedagogical methods of the elementary readers and composition books with the presentation of Spanish-American texts of high literary value. Such outstanding figures in contemporary Spanish-American literature as Rubén Darío, Ricardo Palma, Rufino Blanco-Fombona, Manuel Ugarte, are represented, and the selections from other less important writers were chosen apparently for their literary merit as well as for their local color. Each of the shortest stories

constitutes the text for a single lesson and is followed by a set of four language exercises, *Conversación, Temas, Oraciones, Traducción*. The longer stories are divided into two, three, or four lessons, each followed by a similar set of exercises. The questions of the *Conversación* are exhaustive and insure a thorough preparation; the *Temas* suggest topics for oral or written reproduction; the *Oraciones* compel the student to use in complete sentences all the idiomatic expressions of the text; the *Traducción* offers a résumé of the contents of the text for translation into Spanish. The suggestions for grammar review in some of the lessons do not seem to have any plan or continuity and are of doubtful value. Brief biographical notes on the authors represented are given immediately after the Table of Contents. Explanatory notes on the text are to be found at the end of each lesson; for the most part they are appropriate and sufficient; sometimes they are inadequate, and occasionally futile.

The editor states in the Preface that the aim of the book is "to meet the needs of a second-year high-school student in Spanish or a second-semester college class." In the opinion of the reviewer the selections, with two or three exceptions, present material much too difficult for the student with only one year of preparation. The difficulties in the vocabulary of many of the selections would be discouraging for the second-year student. How many teachers of Spanish are likely to know the following words, all taken from page 83 ("Un Alzamiento," by Blanco-Fombona:—*yuntas, marusa, morral, paletó, guaral, taparita, estambre, pincho?*) Similar lists might be given from other pages. Of course, Americanisms are to be expected in good Spanish-American literature, but they should not be put before second-year students, and it is doubtful whether any text containing so many unusual words should be used as the basis of language exercises. Moreover, a greater difficulty than the abundance of Americanisms is the very idiomatic language of many of the selections. Several are humorous, witty, or satirical in purpose, and such literature is always the most difficult for the foreigner to understand. The racy, peculiarly idiomatic style of Ricardo Palma, the great Peruvian *tradicionista*, is not for beginners, and is not suitable for language exercises at any stage of preparation.

Had the editor published the stories merely as an introduction to Spanish-American literature or had he based his excellent linguistic exercises upon simple texts, the reviewer would have had little opportunity for adverse criticism. The book as it stands is proof of the fact that the best literature is generally not suitable for language exercises.

(b) The seventeen stories and sketches contained in Professor Coester's collection are representative of the best work that is being done by Spanish-American writers in the short story and humorous sketch. Nine countries are represented and in most of the selections the local color is sufficient to give a definite impression of at least one aspect of the country or people represented. One purpose of the book, "to throw light on the ideas and manner of life of our South American neighbors," is thus explained by the editor in the Preface: "Some idea of the significance of the pampa and the gaucho in Argentine life can be obtained from the stories entitled 'Cómo se formaban los Caudillos,' 'El Tiempo Perdido,' and 'Aura.' What revolutions mean to

family life becomes plain from reading 'La Bandera' and 'Los Redentores de la Patria.' The peculiarities of Spanish-American humor are revealed by 'Importantizarse,' 'Artículo de Comercio,' and 'De Hombre a Hombre.' While the intensity of Spanish-American emotions is plain in all the stories, it is overwhelming in 'Anita,' especially valuable for its local color. And to counterbalance any incorrect notions about the state of civilization (because a North American needs to realize that life in the large cities of South America is highly civilized) 'Realidades,' 'La Guitarra y los Doctores,' and 'Un Pobre Diablo' will serve.

The stories and sketches are edited with painstaking care and scholarship. All that the book lacks is an introductory account of the development of the art of short-story writing in Spanish America.

(c) The eleven stories of Professor Turrell's edition were well chosen for their interest and literary value. The selections show considerable variety in style and content, although they are not entirely balanced in their emotional appeal; there is in them as strong a tendency toward the serious and tragic as there is in Professor Laguardia's collection toward the humorous and satirical. Nine countries are represented and eight authors. Three of these, Rubén Darío, Blanco-Fombona and Ricardo Palma, appear also in the other two collections. In the case of Palma, the *tradiciones* selected by the three editors are all different. Blanco-Fombona's realistic description of a political uprising in Venezuela is to be found in all three; in Professor Turrell's edition, as in (a), it is entitled "Un Alzamiento"; in (b) it bears the satirical title "Los Redentores de la Patria." The realistic and very pathetic story "El Fardo" by Rubén Darío is to be found in (c) as well as in (a); the fantastic tale by the same author, "La Muerte de la Emperatriz de la China," appears also in (b), chosen by both editors for its modernistic qualities.

All the stories except perhaps one or two are well worthy of a place in a text-book the main purpose of which is to serve as an introduction to Spanish-American fiction. They are well printed and well edited as far as concerns notes and vocabulary; a critical introduction on the short story in Spanish America would have increased the usefulness of the book as in the case of (b).

G. W. U.

El Metal de los Muertos, by Concha Espina, Madrid, 1920.

Concha Espina stands unique as the only woman writer who has been honored by the award of the Spanish Academy. The novel for which she received this prize, consisting of five thousand pesetas, is a study of that remnant of the earliest known inhabitants of Spain, the Celtiberians, who now live in the hill-country around Astorga, in the province of Leon, and who are known as the Maragatos. This book, "La Esfinge Maragata," or "The Maragatan Sphinx," is a realistic picture of these people, who seem to be living in a past age, and to whom the word progress possesses no meaning. It is of permanent value as a revelation of the manners and customs of this tribe